

National Family Caregiver Support Program Resources

Home Modifications and Assistive Devices



Introduction

Caregiving can be physically demanding. Caregivers need support for their own health, strength, and energy. Home modifications and assistive devices can provide relief and reduce stress on caregivers. Learn more about what you can do to modify your home to make caregiving easier and safer for you and your loved one.

Home modifications are changes to the home. They provide comfort and safety. Examples of home modifications include grab bars, handrails, ramps, curbless showers, stair lifts, and wider doorways.

Assistive devices are items or pieces of equipment that can help you carry out daily activities. Examples of assistive devices include raised toilet seats, reachers, and walkers.

This fact sheet suggests ways that the home environment can help you in the following three caregiving activities that often are difficult: bathing/showering, toileting, and getting in and out of the home.

Bathing/Showering

- **Place non-skid strips or decals in the tub or shower.** This will provide better traction and help avoid slipping.
- **Install shower or flexible hand-held showerhead.** This will make it easier to reach and clean most parts of the body.
- **Use a shower/tub chair.** This will allow your relative to be seated while bathing.

- **Install a flexible hand-held showerhead at a sink.** This will allow basic cleaning to take place at any sink.
- **Use a no-rinse shower cap (disposable, with pre-mixed shampoo and conditioner).** This will make it possible to wash your relative's hair anywhere.
- **Add a call button.** This will contact help for you or your relative in an emergency.
- **Install a ceiling lift system.** This will help transport a person into the bathing or showering area.

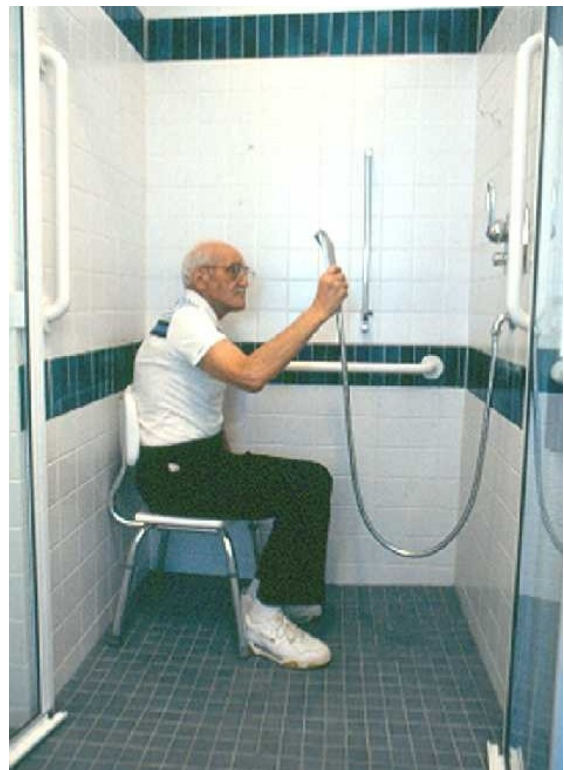


Photo provided by the University of Southern California, Andrus Gerontology Center, National Resource Center on Supportive Housing and Home Modification

Toileting

- **Install a night-light.** This will help you find your way to the bathroom in the dark.
- **Install grab bars or ceiling-mounted vertical pole.** This will give you and/or the person you are helping something to hold on to.
- **Install a raised toilet seat, high-rise toilet, or floor/seat adapters.** This will make it easier to get on and off the toilet.
- **Use a commode or bedpan.** This will reduce the number of trips to the toilet.

Getting In/Out Of The Home

- **Install handrails on both sides of steps.** This will provide support to avoid falls.
- **Install lever door handles or attach lever adapters to round doorknobs.** This will make it easier to open the door.
- **Provide the care receiver with a cane, walker, or wheelchair.** This will provide stable support in moving from place to place.
- **Install swing-clear hinges to existing doors.** This will make doorways wider for a wheelchair or walker.
- **Install a ramp or chair elevator.** This will make it easier to use a wheelchair or walker.

A Home Assessment Check-up

Every caregiving situation is different. A home assessment can help you decide what will work best for you. Depending on their knowledge, the following professionals can help assess your home and make recommendations: Occupational and physical therapists, case managers, gerontologists, social workers, registered nurses, contractors, and remodelers.

You can learn more about home modifications and assistive devices from the following:

Disease-oriented organizations (e.g., Alzheimer's Association, Arthritis Association, Cerebral Palsy Association, Multiple Sclerosis Society, Stroke Association)

Family Caregiver Alliance (1-800-445-8106; www.caregiver.org)

Local Area Agency on Aging for local resources and senior centers (1-800-677-1116; or www.eldercare.gov)

Local Center for Independent Living (look up in your local telephone directory, or click on www.virtualcil.net/cils/ or www.bcm.tmc.edu/ilru/jump1.htm)

Local durable medical equipment store (A directory of suppliers that provide durable medical equipment products under the Medicare program is available at: www.medicare.gov/Supplier/Home.asp)

National Family Caregiver Support Program, U.S. Administration on Aging (www.aoa.gov/prof/aoaprogram/caregiver/caregiver.asp)

National Resource Center on Supportive Housing and Home Modification (A National Directory of Home Modification Resources is available at www.homemods.org)

United Cerebral Palsy (1-800-872-5827); www.ucpa.org)

Information provided in this fact sheet was adapted from materials submitted by the University of Southern California, Andrus Gerontology Center, National Resource Center on Supportive Housing and Home Modification. For more information, visit their website www.homemods.org.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

AoA recognizes the importance of making information readily available to consumers, professionals, researchers, and students. Our website provides information for and about older persons, their families, and professionals involved in aging programs and services. For more information about AoA, please contact: US Dept of Health and Human Services, Administration on Aging, Washington, DC 20201; phone: (202) 401-4541; fax (202) 357-3560; Email: aoainfo@aoa.gov; or contact our website at: www.aoa.gov